United Nations

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FRIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Secretary-General expresses sorrow at failure of diplomacy to resolve Persian Gulf crisis and consequent necessity to resort to force; calls for intensified diplomatic efforts, respect for humanitarian law, assistance to affected civilians.

- European Community informs United Nations of its intentions to ease sanctions adopted against South Africa in 1986.

- UNICEF appeals for $110 million for aid to African countries struck by drought, civil strife and economic hardship.

- Negotiating Committee on climate change convention ends debate; hears urgent appeal by Kuwait to international community to help save its environment.

- Director-General of UNESCO, prompted by Gulf war, appeals for "scrupulous observance" of obligations and duties under Hague Convention for Protection of Cultural Property in Event of Armed Conflict.

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The Security Council this afternoon continued its informal consultations on the Persian Gulf conflict. In a statement before the Council, Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar stated that he had watched the developments of the past 23 days "with anguish and regret". He said that, as Secretary-General of the United Nations, he could not but be "saddened by the failure of diplomatic efforts, including my own, and the consequent necessity to resort to force".

The Secretary-General stated that he had hoped, until the last moment, that the situation between Iraq and Kuwait could be solved peacefully. He said it was in a final effort to avert hostilities that he had appealed publicly on 15 January to President Saddam Hussein to signify his readiness to comply with the Council's resolutions.

(more)

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There was no indication as yet that Iraq had reconsidered its position, he said. The hostilities continued, despite the diplomatic efforts of a number of Governments and his own. A massive military confrontation was under way in the region, with immense implications for Iraq, Kuwait and the world as a whole. The Secretary-General emphasized that that should not mean that diplomatic efforts to solve the crisis should be put on hold. On the contrary, he said, they needed to be intensified.

Now that the crisis had entered a new phase, the Secretary-General wished to draw attention to the appeal of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), issued on 1 February, which pointed out that millions of civilians had been caught up in violence, without shelter or protection against occupation and bombing. He said he increasingly felt that the United Nations system should provide whatever humanitarian assistance it could, both to refugees and to displaced persons, and to the civilian population in the area.

Mr. Perez de Cuellar, in closing, stated that he had received numerous expressions of despair -- in letters, press editorials and appeals -- regarding the "tragic dimensions and incalculable consequences of the conflict. This is a testing moment for the Organization", he said.

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The 12 member States of the European Community have informed the United Nations of their intention to relax sanctions against South Africa. They had decided in December that as soon as action was taken by the South African Government to repeal the Group Areas Act and the two Land Acts, they would make such a move.

With the announcement by South African President F.W. de Klerk regarding the repeal of the discriminatory legislation, they said, a new path was opened "towards the complete and irreversible abolition of apartheid and the establishment of a united, non-racial and democratic South Africa". Under those circumstances, the Community would prepare the necessary steps to ease the set of sanctions it adopted against South Africa in 1986.

The position of the Twelve was transmitted to the Secretary-General in a letter from Ambassador Jean Feyder of Luxembourg, their current Chairman.

The Chairman of the Committee against Apartheid, Ibrahim Gambari (Nigeria), said earlier this week that pressure on South Africa should be maintained during the process of future negotiations towards the preparation and adoption of a new constitution. A rush to lift restrictive measures now, he said, "would have the effect of prematurely depriving the international community of the possibility of applying appropriate pressure if necessary, at a later stage".

In a related development, Botswana has urged the Government of South Africa to accelerate the pace of reform. In a statement transmitted to the Secretary-General, the Government of Botswana said President De Klerk's speech

contained "some positive elements as well as some elements that show little or no progress". For instance, it said, the speech was silent on the questions of violence and the release of political prisoners -- a point which was also raised by the United Nations Special Committee against Apartheid.

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The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) today appealed to the international community for $110 million to respond to non-food needs of African countries battered by drought, civil strife and a worsening economic plight.

The Fund said in a communiqué issued at Headquarters, that the appeal was part of the continuing global effort by the United Nations to alert the international community to the worsening situation in many African countries. More that 20 million people in Ethiopia, Somalia, the Sudan, Angola, Mozambique, Malawi and Liberia were prey to famine this year, UNICEF said.

The UNICEF expressed concern in the communiqué that, while the world was focusing on the Gulf crisis, the restructuring of Eastern Europe and other international problems, vitally necessary resources might not be available for Africa.

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The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for a framework convention on climate change yesterday heard an urgent appeal by Kuwait to the international community to help save its environment. The Committee yesterday concluded its general debate on preparations for the elaboration of an instrument on climate change.

During the debate, which began on Tuesday, 5 February, speakers focused on the urgency of addressing the issue of global warming, the need for a comprehensive approach to climate change, and the provision of energy-efficient technologies to developing countries to enable them to reduce carbon dioxide emissions as they develop their economies.

The threat to low-lying and small island States from global warming and a sea-level rise, as well as the special needs of African countries affected by desertification and drought, were also raised. Everyone agreed that a framework convention on climate change should be ready for signing during the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Brazil.

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The Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Frederico Mayor, said yesterday in a statement issued at Headquarters that the events arising from the occupation and annexation of Kuwait and the military operations had caused great damage and claimed large numbers of civilian victims in Iraq and Kuwait. The growing scale of the confrontation was seriously threatening the life and security of

all the countries and peoples of the region, including the Palestinian people, he said.

Referring to UNESCO's ethical and moral role, Mr. Mayor appealed for scrupulous observance of the obligations and duties imposed by international law, and, in particular, by the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

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